

difficult to predict. Regardless, there are two factors that need to be recognized relative to the future utility of the concept of strategic stability as traditionally understood. The first is the difficult question of “*how much is enough*”, and why an assured destruction retaliatory capability is defined as enough, even though this capability is not easily specified. Certainly, one warhead is not enough, but then a thousand is way too much. How the political-military leadership of a state answers this question will significantly determine the impact of missile defences on response options, and thus strategic stability. As long they believe that their forces are sufficient, and act to ensure sufficiency, then stability will obtain.

However, if this remains the case, the world will remain one of nuclear weapons and defence and security based upon nuclear deterrence. Unless strategic stability is rejected or re-defined, its utility remains as a measure of deterrence stability grounded upon nuclear weapons and assured destruction. But, missile defences do not necessarily have to be defined relative to strategic or deterrence stability. It is also possible that missile defences lead away from strategic stability and towards the possibility that defences negate the relevance of strategic stability entirely. In so doing, it also means negating deterrence, and potentially eliminating the political value and utility of nuclear weapons. If this is the case, then the standard interpretation of the missile defence – ABM Treaty relationship needs to be rethought.

### **Re-conceptualizing Strategic Stability**

There are two basic arguments for re-conceptualizing strategic stability. First, it is a concept that has been a central element of the public policy debate on missile defence and the ABM Treaty, and used repeatedly by senior government officials. As such, it would be difficult simply to drop the concept entirely, and politically problematic to suggest suddenly that it has no meaning in the current international security environment. Second, strategic stability has already been implicitly re-conceptualized. Although there has been no formal specification of its new meaning, the context in which the concept is used, and thus linked to a series of outcomes that are predicted to follow if the ABM Treaty collapses, provides a nascent new conceptualization. Furthermore, in piecing together its new meaning, it is also possible to provide a brief analysis of the implicit new meaning ascribed to strategic stability.

Piecing together the new meaning of strategic stability begins with two assumptions. First, the US proceeds with the test programmes of its multi-faceted missile defence programme, and subsequently deploys a limited operational missile defence system for North America, which includes, *inter alia*, a ground-based component that violates the ABM Treaty. Second, sometime during this process, the US, having failed to reach an agreement with Russia on amending the ABM Treaty, provides six months notice of withdrawal, and subsequently withdraws, leaving the Treaty null and void. As a result, *the or a cornerstone* of strategic stability disappears.

It is important to differentiate between the treatment of the ABM Treaty as *the* and *a cornerstone*. The former implies that strategic stability no longer exists in the absence of the Treaty; the system by definition is now an unstable one. The latter implies that stability may still exist, because other components of strategic stability remain in place. It is possible to identify four other cornerstones, which apparently will all fall like a line of dominos. The first is the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaties (Talks)–START. Russia has made it fairly clear that if the US abandons ABM, it will abandon START, bringing to an end the entire bilateral arms control process inherited from the Cold War.

The end of this process coincides with the build-up of strategic nuclear forces on the part of Russia and China, thereby ending the process of nuclear reductions – the second additional cornerstone. Russia has made it clear that its response will be to increase its strategic warheads and MIRV its strategic launchers. Similarly, China has also made it clear that its response would be a dramatic increase in its